

In Response

What Is Unnatural about "Extrinsic Reinforcement?"

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In behavior analysis, one often thinks of "natural reinforcement" only as consequences which "are the natural and automatic results of responding" (Dickinson, 1989, p. 2). Those consequences which are either contrived by some social agency or a product of interacting with another human are referred to as "artificial" or "extrinsic" reinforcement. While there may be some face validity to those distinctions, and much has been written about them, not all agree that those distinctions are valuable. It is even possible that such distinctions hinder the general acceptance of behavior analysis in the community. If so, we should re-examine this issue with some care.

John Dewey, a philosopher generally opposed to dichotomies, was one who would disagree with contemporary distinctions between "natural" and "artificial," "intrinsic" and "extrinsic," and the like. We may learn something from him which could help our analyses:

When a child acts, those about him react. They shower encouragement on him, visit him with approval, or they bestow frowns and rebuke. What others do to us when we act is as natural a consequence of our action as what the fire does to us when we plunge our hands in it. (Dewey, 1922/1957, pp. 287-288).

REFERENCES

- Dewey, J. (1957). *Human nature and conduct*. New York: The Modern Library. (Original work published 1922)
- Dickinson, A. M. (1989). The detrimental effects of extrinsic reinforcement on "intrinsic motivation." *The Behavior Analyst*, 12, 1-15.

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